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SUBJECT: TURKEY: U/S BURNS' MEETING WITH PRESIDENT GUL

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Gul emphasized the GOT's wish to strengthen Turkish-U.S. ties during a September 19 meeting with U/S Burns. He wants to work closely with us on upcoming meetings of the Iraq Expanded Neighbors process and on Middle East peace. Gul noted the PKK as a major impediment to improved ties between Turkey and Iraq, as well as with Iraqi Kurds. He hopes the Iraqis will realize they have far more to gain from improved ties with Turkey than from continued tolerance of a PKK presence in northern Iraq. Gul expressed trepidation about the negative impact of congressional passage of an Armenian genocide resolution (AGR) on Turkey-U.S. ties, underscoring that it would take years to repair the damage. He also conveyed Turkey's frustration with the continued isolation of Turkish Cypriots and asked for U.S. help in encouraging the EU to increase its economic engagement with northern Cyprus. END SUMMARY

U.S.-Turkey Relations Very Important

12. (C) During a meeting in Ankara September 19, President Gul told U/S Burns that the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Turkey is extremely important. Although it has been truly tested over the past five years, its strong basis of shared values over five decades would see it through difficult times. Democratic values are flourishing in Turkey; Turkey is, in fact, a model for the Middle East region in this regard, though he would never say that publicly. Turkey will continue to do what it can to encourage the spread of democracy and our shared values throughout the region. Gul expressed appreciation that President Bush had been the very first foreign leader to call with congratulations after his election as president. He praised the Strategic Vision document he and Secretary Rice signed last year, noting that officials in both Turkey and the U.S. have worked hard to improve and strengthen the bilateral relationship. Burns expressed the USG's strong desire to continue strengthening our bilateral ties and said

that we look forward to greatly increasing our engagement, including an upcoming visit by the Secretary to Istanbul for the Iraq Expanded Neighbors ministerial and planned visits by PM Erdogan and President Gul to Washington.

Coordinating on MEPP, Iraq...and the PKK

13. (C) Burns said that although critics see Abu Mazen and PM Olmert as too weak to achieve peace, the U.S. is working hard to organize a serious Middle East peace conference. Noting that Turkey is a serious player in the region, he added the USG hopes to work with it. Our Middle East experts will meet prior to the conference. Gul said all countries in the region seem to trust the Turks and urged us to utilize them to press the Palestinians and others for peace, an effort the GOT would indeed support.

14. (C) U/S Burns expressed the hope that when ministers gather in Istanbul for the Iraq Neighbors meeting, they will gain a greater appreciation for Turkey's struggle against the PKK and give Turkey additional support in that fight. The U.S. strongly supports Turkey on this issue and will continue to try to find ways to do more. Burns urged Gul to consider meeting with Iraqi President Talabani and to engage directly with Massoud Barzani and Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) officials to discuss this issue and others of common interest. Gul responded that the PKK issue remains a barrier to improved Turkish-Iraq relations, as well as Turkey's ties to Iraqi Kurds. GOT officials understand the internal political problem Iraqi Kurdish leaders face in countering a group such as the PKK that shares a common ethnicity. Turkish companies have a strong economic presence in northern Iraq and there is a natural affinity between Kurds and Turks.

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Gul said Iraqi Kurdish leaders must consider this calculus in determining where their best interests lie and who their true friends are. Gul stated that Turkey has the military capability to stop PKK attacks emanating from northern Iraq, but that it does not want to damage Iraq or Turkey's relations with it.

15. (C) If, Gul claimed, Iraqi Kurdish leaders could make some serious gestures to counter the threat the PKK presence inside Iraq poses to Turkey's security, this would resonate throughout Turkey. Turks remember well how Barzani himself was threatened by the PKK many years ago -- were it not for Turkish tanks, Barzani very likely would have been killed by PKK forces fighting their way into Erbil. Turkey is now looking for the same kind of support from Barzani and the KDP. U/S Burns agreed that KRG officials must make a greater effort on the PKK and said that the U.S.-TU-IZ trilateral process to counter the PKK needs to be more active as well. Referring to news reports that a cousin of FM Babacan serving in the Turkish military had been killed the previous night in the southeast, Burns conveyed his condolences and expressed his sympathy with Turkey's continued struggle against terror.

AGR Threatens to Destroy Everything

16. (C) U/S Burns said the Administration is working hard to oppose any Armenian genocide resolution in Congress. He noted Secretary Rice had spoken with House leadership. Former Secretaries of State and Defense will sign joint letters opposing such a resolution. He admitted that the resolution could come to a vote at any time, adding that, despite the Administration's best efforts, it very well could pass. Gul expressed appreciation for Administration efforts to date and emphasized that at such a critical juncture, when Turkey and the United States need to increase bilateral cooperation to achieve important goals, passage of an AGR threatens to destroy "everything between us," including all the progress we have made in the past two years. It would require many years to repair the damage.

17. (C) Burns said he had heard that FM Babacan and his Armenian counterpart FM Oskanian may meet on the margins of UNGA next week. He urged the GOT to reach out to Armenia -- establish diplomatic relations, open the border -- in order to create a new dynamic in the bilateral relationship and help stem the Congressional resolution's momentum. He assured Gul that the U.S. would urge the Government of Armenia to meet Turkey halfway. Gul responded that the GOT is not happy with the abysmal state of its bilateral relationship with its neighbor to the east. Turkey, however, has made many gestures that Yerevan has not reciprocated. Gul assured Burns that the GOT seeks to be "problem-solvers" on this issue; the Armenians need to take a similar "big picture" approach.

Cyprus: We Were Cheated

18. (C) U/S Burns expressed continued USG support for UNSYG Ban-Ki Moon's efforts to reignite talks between Turkish and Greek Cypriots on a comprehensive Cyprus settlement and asked Gul's advice on how best to move forward. Gul responded that Cyprus is a frustrating issue for Turkey. It had supported the Annan Plan, only to see the Greek Cypriots reject it. He recalled as well the words of then-EU Enlargement Commissioner Guenther Verheugen in the aftermath of the Greek Cypriot vote against the Plan -- "We were cheated." Gul said the EU has forgotten its promises to end Turkish Cypriots' economic isolation and he asked that the U.S. continue to urge the Europeans to make good on them. Burns said the U.S. would continue to work on behalf of a Cyprus settlement, and would encourage UNSYG Ban toward that end.

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19. (U) U/S Burns has cleared this cable.

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WILSON